THE ELDERS and MESSENGERS

OF THE SEVERAL

BAPTIST CHURCHES,

MEETING AT

Cheltenham, *Pithay* and *Broadmead*, BRISTOL, *Frome*, *Loughwood*, *Wellington*, *Tiverton*, *Exon*, *Paulton*, *Plymouth*, *Kingſbridge*, *Chacewater*, and *Falmouth*; having received letters alſo from *Horſly*, *Gritteleton*, *Bratton*, *Trowbridge*, *Melkſham*, *Bradford*, *Crockerton*, *Horſington*, *Croſcombe*, *Sarum*, *Lyme*, *Chard*, *Bicknell*, *Uppottery*, *Preſcott*, *Cullumpton*, and *Yeovil*; being met in aſſociation at *Kingſbridge*, *Devon*, *May* 29 and 30, 1776. to the ſeveral Churches they repreſent, ſend greeting.

BELOVED BRETHREN,

WE have ſtill abundant reaſon to ſing of mercy as well as of judgment. The divine maſter we ſerve with our ſpirits in the goſpel, hath, through his immenſe goodneſs and indulgent providence, favoured us with another annual aſſembly, and with ſuch gracious tokens of his ſacred preſence as have rendered the ſeaſon pleaſing and profitable, and encouraged us both as Miniſters and Chriſtians to go on our way rejoicing.

We have read and heard your letters with ſuch ſenſations of joy and ſorrow, as the different ſubjects were calculated to excite in us; and we have with deep concern, in unity of ſpirit offered up, in the endearing name of Jeſus, many inwrought prayers and ſupplications with thankſgivings on your account.

We are happy to find that you, in theſe days of error and apoſtaſy, hold faſt the eſſential truths of the glorious goſpel and the profeſſion of your faith without wavering, and greatly rejoice that the ſeveral churches we repreſent are in peace among themſelves; which ineſtimable bleſſing may the God

of peace continue, for all the valuable purpoſes of his glory, and your mutual happineſs! The joy of our aſſembly is yet more increaſed by the pleaſing intelligence brought us, that many of the churches under the ſweet droppings of the celeſtial dews, and the vivifying rays of the glorious ſun of righteouſneſs, have experienced times of refreſhing from the preſence of the Lord, ſat under his ſhadow with great delight, and received conſiderable additions, both to their numbers and graces. O when ſhall every little hill of Zion be thus honoured, when ſhall the parched ground be fruitful and the deſert bud and bloſſom as the roſe, the trees of the Lord be full of ſap, the tender vines bear their ripe cluſters, and the labourers have no longer occaſion to ſay, we have laboured in vain, and ſpent our ſtrength for nought!

What though we yet ſee not the glory revealed, which is promiſed to the Church in the latter day, ſhall we not ſtill pray and look up in full confidence that not a tittle of what he hath promiſed ſhall fail, though oppoſed by all the powers of earth and hell! Faithful is he that hath promiſed who will alſo do it. In the mean while let paſt and preſent mercies awaken gratitude in the hearts of all the redeemed of the Lord. We have indeed infinite reaſon to be thankful; the Lord, with regard to his providential gifts and bounties, hath exceeded even our expectations, and is yet able to do for us far more exceeding and abundantly above all that we can either aſk or think. The bleſſings of his grace demand our continued and perpetual ſongs of praiſe, nor ought we to forget that we are ſtill in poſſeſſion of thoſe civil and religious liberties which our venerable fathers and anceſtors being deprived of ſtruggled ſo hard to obtain, and which we their children, as Britons and Proteſtants, eſteem dearer than our very lives.

But amidſt all theſe divine favors, we are conſtrained at preſent to mingle many ſorrows with our joys, and to weep as the miniſters of the Lord formerly did between the porch and the altar. The occaſions of our ſorrow are multiplied. Thouſands of our fellow men around us that muſt ſoon die and come to judgment are periſhing for lack of knowledge; vice and irreligion mutually aſſiſting each other are daily making their encroachments among us, our land full of ſins and abominations is ripe for judgment, and the Lord ſeems now to be riſing up out of his place from the mercy ſeat to execute vengance, and to do his ſtrange work in puniſhing the inhabitants of the earth. We have awful tokens of his

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diſpleaſure in this once united and happy, but now divided and diſtracted empire; involved in an unnatural and bloody war, which hath every alarming circumſtance of horror and diſtreſs attending it.

When we reflect on theſe calamities, and add to them all our own manifold deficiences, little ſucceſs in the Lord's vineyard, and the affecting complaints of various declenſions, much deadneſs, and lukewarmneſs, expreſſed in ſome of your letters, our very ſouls are diſtreſſed, our hearts bleed, and we are ready each to ſay, with the weeping prophet, oh! that mine head were waters and mine eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep day and night for the ſlain of the daughter of my people!

And now what ſhall we ſay to you, Brethren, in this day of Jacob's troubles? It is probable we ſhall never, on ſuch an occaſion, at leaſt not all of us, have another opportunity of giving, or you of receiving, counſel from us; therefore looking up to God for direction with the moſt intenſe longings of ſoul to promote his glory, and your preſent and future happineſs, we would addreſs you with all the concern of miniſters, the love of chriſtians, and the ſerioufneſs of dying men, expecting ſoon either to meet you in glory, or at the judgment ſeat of Chriſt; and by ſuch intereſting views we now beſeech you by the bowels and tender mercies of God in Chriſt Jeſus to ſuffer our word of advice and exhortation. Enquire into the cauſe of your preſent complaints; is it not the ſame for which the holy and terrible God in juſt diſpleaſure caſt legions of angels down to hell, drowned the old world, conſumed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, deſtroyed Egypt, and viſited his antient people with many heavy and ſore judgments? If ſo, then acknowledge his juſtice in his preſent diſpenſations, and adore that mercy which is ſtill mixed with judgment, ſeeing we are afflicted ſo much leſs than our iniquities have deſerved, for it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not conſumed, becauſe his compaſſions fail not. The Lord gracious and merciful, is yet a prayer hearing God, his eyes are upon his people, and his ears are always open to their prayers, therefore humble yourſelves at his footſtool and pour out your complaints before him; plead your exigences, ſay Lord, we are afflicted and diſtreſſed, undertake for us, plead his encouraging and precious promiſes, the infinite pity and tenderneſs of his heart, yea plead the ſaviours precious blood; be importunate and ceaſe not your cries to heaven and wreſtlings with the angel of

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the covenant, for our land, our ſovereign, the churches of Chriſt and his intereſt through the world, till our breaches are healed, the tokens of divine diſpleaſure removed, Zion built up, and the voice of joy and gladneſs, thankſgiving and melody is heard to the utmoſt bounds of this extenſive empire. Beware of indulging ſlaviſh fears, leaſt they cauſe you to faint in the day of adverſity. Commit all your concerns, whether national, eccleſiaſtic, domeſtic, or perſonal, into his hands, who beareth up the pillars of the earth, is King in Zion, and doth all things according to the counſel of his own will. As our preſent ſtate is a warfare and full of viciſſitudes, let it be your chief care to be ready for all events of providence, particularly for death, and the terribly glorious coming of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt. Your ſummons to the bar of God may be ſudden, therefore beware of neglecting the important concern of ſalvation, leſt you be found in that tremendous day without the wedding garment. If you would not loſe your ſouls take heed how and on what foundation you build for eternity; you may periſh *with*, as well as *without a profeſſion*. What will your reformation from external vices, your lamps of profeſſion and church privileges avail you, when the rains deſcend, the floods come, and the winds blow, if you are not built upon the rock of ages, and have no refuge in the ark Chriſt, from the ſtormy tempeſt? While you profeſs to believe and truſt in the blood and righteouſneſs of Chriſt alone for your juſtification and acceptance with God, without any qualification or worthineſs of your own to recommend you; ſee to it that your faith is not an *empty notion*, a dead faith, like a carcaſe without the ſpirit.

If you are the happy ſubjects of true faith, it will always endear Chriſt to your ſouls, produce true repentance, ſelf loathing. an hatred to ſin, conformity to God, ſubmiſſion to his will, victory over the world, the fleſh and devil, and cauſe you to love ſuch as bear the image of Chriſt, however they may differ from you about the circumſtantials of religion. If you would be lively chriſtians, happy in your own ſouls, uſeful in your generation, an honour to your profeſſion, the delight of angels, and a joy and crown of rejoicing to your miniſters in the day of the Lord; walk by faith, keep near to God, and give due attention to every perſonal and relative duty.

The doctrines of free grace, and ſalvation from ſin and hell are far from opening the door to licentiouſneſs, they give

give no ſort of encouragement to the profeſſors of the chriſtian religion to indulge their ſinful paſſions, and ſenſual appetites. What excuſe can you as redeemed ſouls and the expectants of glory have for negligence and ſlothfulneſs in the ways and things of God? Was your divine maſter ſlothful when *he* came from heaven on the kind errand of your ſalvation? Are holy angels ſlothful in executing the will of God? Were the prophets and apoſtles of Chriſt ſlothful? Are wicked men ſlothful in the paths of ſin? Or, are devils ſlothful in their attempts to deſtroy the ſouls of men? We would by theſe and every other moving conſideration excite you to diligence, and intreat you to ariſe and trim your trembling lamps. The time is ſhort, therefore do with your might what your hands find to do, for God, for the goſpel, the ſalvation of ſouls, and the benefit of your fellow men. Grieve not your miniſters, but pray for them, hold up their hands, and endeavor to lighten, if you cannot remove their burthens. Let not your places be empty in the houſe of God, but on preſſing occaſions; you may be great loſers by ſuch ſinful omiſſions. Conſider all duties as privileges, depend on God for ſtrength to perform them, and attend on them as in the ſight of God, and in the views of eternity. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, and keep the unity of the ſpirit in the bond of peace, always remembering that you are redeemed by the ſame precious blood, are the children of one father, members of one body, ſtones of the ſame ſpiritual building, branches of one vine, ſoldiers under the ſame general, ſheep of one fold, and heirs of the ſame heavenly inheritance; therefore like your Lord and Maſter be pitiful, be tender hearted, forbearing one another in love, and forgiving one another, even as God, for Chriſt's ſake, hath forgiven you.

Touching the duties of the family and cloſet, be ſo conſtant in obſerving them that all around you may ſee you have the cauſe of God and religion at heart, and through the frequent reading of the holy ſcriptures, catechiſing, &c. let your children be brought up in the fear, nurture, and admonition of the Lord, and be more concerned for the ſalvation of their ſouls, than even the wellfare of their bodies. We wiſh you to attend more conſtantly on private meetings for prayer and conference. Be frequent in the great duty of ſelf-examination, that you may know how matters ſtand between God and your own ſouls, what wants you have to

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be ſupplied, what ſins and temptations to wateh againſt, what corruptions to be mortified, and what advances you make in the grace of God, and in the knowledge of Jeſus Chriſt, and ſo may be happily preſerved from ſuch backſlidings, as will otherwiſe mar your peace, injure your profeſſion, grieve the ſpirit of God, wound the hearts of your brethren, and perhaps cauſe you to go down with ſorrow to the grave.

And now, Brethren, we commend you to God, may He bleſs, keep and comfort you in all your tribulations, enable you to truſt in him at all times, and encreaſe you yet more and more in knowledge, faith, hope, love, patience, purity and heavenly mindedneſs, may you always carry about with you a lively remembrance of the dying of the Lord Jeſus, and the obligations you are under, as redeemed ſouls, to glorify him with your bodies, ſpirits, time and talents, that when he, who is the chief ſhepherd, ſhall appear, you may have an abundant entrance into the everlaſting kingdom of our Lord and ſaviour Jeſus Chriſt, where we expect to meet you, and as companions in the ſame bliſs to unite in our praiſes to God that ſitteth upon the throne, and to the lamb for ever.

Signed, on behalf of the whole Aſſembly, by the Moderator. } JOHN KINGDON.

BREVIATES.

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WEDNESDAY afternoon, three o'clock, the aſſociation began in prayer by our Brother *Burford*, Brother *Kingdon* was choſen moderator, the preliminaries were read, as uſual, and the letters from the churches, Brother *Gibbs* was deſired to prepare the circular letter, and the meeting concluded in prayer, by Brother *Sotteridge*.

At ſeven in the evening Brother *Tommas* preached a ſermon from Eph. iii. 19. *And to know the love of Chriſt.*

At ſix o'clock Thurſday morning, met, by appointment, for prayer, when our Brethren *Morgan*, *Symonds*, *Sprague*, and *E. Francis* engaged.

The public meeting was opened in prayer, at ten o'clock, by our Brother *Sprague*, Brother *Day* ſucceeded in prayer, after which a ſuitable hymn was ſung, our Brother *Kingdon* preached from Prov. xi. 30. *He that winneth ſouls is wiſe;* and the ſervice was cloſed in prayer by Brother *Tommas*.

In the afternoon, at half paſt two, met again, when our Brother *Sotteridge* began in prayer, Brother *S. Dunſcombe* preached from *James* iv. 8. *Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you*, and Brother *H. Evans* concluded in prayer. The general letter was then read, approved and ſigned, and the aſſociation cloſed in prayer, as uſual, by the Moderator.

Out of the newly formed *aſſociation fund*, benefactions were granted to two churches towards repairing their places of worſhip, and a ſmall preſent voted to an aged miniſter and member of the aſſociation. The remainder, it was agreed, ſhould be applied to the forming of a ſmall capital, for the ſupport of this uſeful deſign.

The churches are deſired to take notice, that at their repeated requeſt, a new edition is printed of that excellent little body of divinity, *A ſcriptural expoſition of the Baptiſt catechiſm*, by our Brother *B. Beddome*, it having been long out of print. And as the reprinting this CATECHISM will be attended with a very conſiderable expence to the author, it is hoped the ſeveral churches will take a competent number of them to keep by them for future as well as preſent uſe, as the author will not otherwiſe be indemnified for the expence he is neceſſarily put to by this labour of love.

It was unanimouſly agreed to recommend to the churches the obſervation of days of ſolemn humiliation, faſting and prayer, on account of our unhappy ſtate as a nation, plunged as we are in all the horrors of a bloody civil war! Pray to the God of peace, that he would reſtore peace to us, and bring about, in the methods of his all-wiſe providence, a happy reconciliation betwixt Great-Britain and her American colonies!

Agreed, to hold the next aſſociation at *Preſcott*, *Tueſday* afternoon at three o'clock, and *Wedneſday* in the EASTER-Week, there being a FAIR in that neighbourhood on the Wedneſday in the *Whitſun* week, on which account it would be inconvenient to meet at that time. Our Brethren *H. Evans*, and *Benj. Francis* to preach the ſermons, or in caſe of failure, our Brother *Tommas*.

In the ſeveral churches the laſt year, there were

Baptized, and receiv'd by letter.	}	121
Dead - - - - -		64
Excluded - - -		5
		69
Increaſe		52

☞ The Baptiſt Catechiſm, printed very neatly and on a fine paper, may be had of *M. Ward*, printer, in *Corn-ſtreet. Briſtol*, with the ſcripture proofs, at 15s. per hundred, and without at 7s. 6d. or by applying to *T. Evans*, book-binder, No. 12, *Stokes Croft*; of whom may be had Mr. *Beddome*'s Catechiſm, price 1s. bound in canvas, 14d. in ſheep, and 18d. in calf.

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